

## USING CONTENT ANALYSIS WITH OPEN ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Content analysis is a data reduction technique that has been used extensively to pick out patterns in media coverage, political statements and other textual materials. It involves either manual or automated analysis of key words and phrases. Once key words or themes are identified in textual materials, the frequency with which those themes are mentioned can be counted. On the day after President George W. Bush's State of the Union address in January 2006, for example, the *Washington Post* provided a comparison of the number of times that words such as freedom, democracy, terrorism were used in the speech in comparison to parallel speeches in 2002 through 2005. Counts of words, phrases or the use of specific concepts in textual material is used to discern how important certain ideas. In some countries, USAID/Missions include a content analysis element to projects dealing with corruption, HIV/AIDS and other topics where the presence of words in media reports may signal awareness or a growing willingness to address an issue.

Similar techniques can be used to analyze responses to open-ended questions in interviews and surveys undertaken in support of evaluations. With open-ended questionnaire responses the first step is to read all of the responses to a specific question and note patterns. The first reading may identify a large number of words or phrases that seem to be important. For example, on a staff survey in a health clinic an open ended question asked whether automation was viewed as being useful for recordkeeping in the clinic. The initial review of answers turned up several key phrases:

- Useful for searching files
- Better records
- Not portable
- Faster
- Improves accuracy of information
- Difficult to use quickly

A second reading suggests that these phrases can be clustered:

- Positive with respect to efficiency: Useful for searching files; faster
- Positive with respect to the quality of information: Improves accuracy of information; better records
- Negative with respect to efficiency: Difficult to use quickly; not portable.

A third stage review further reduces the data and quantifies it:

- Positive view of automation: 4
- Negative view of automation: 2

Data reduction of this sort can be stopped at any stage. In some instances it may not be important to quantify response patterns. On the other hand, if other data is quantitative in nature, or includes demographic information, it may be useful to quantify patterns in qualitative answers to facilitate further analysis, along the lines suggested below.

Age of Respondent	View on Automated Records	
	Positive	Negative
Under 40	4	0
Over 40	0	2

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## **Qualitative (Text or Open Ended; Non-Numeric) Data**

Some of your greatest opportunities to understand your results will come from the comments that people have provided. Remember that satisfied people often don't make comments or have little to say, so if you find a disproportionate number of negative comments, don't be too discouraged. Look at each of them as an opportunity. Just as with numeric data, you should look for trends in the qualitative data. You will probably need a much larger *n* to spot trends, but they are important to identify so you don't get misguided by one or two comments that might not reflect the views of very many of your constituents.

### ***Qualitative Data Analysis -***

1. Start by reading through all the comments. Get a feeling for what people are saying.
2. Now go back and categorize the comments into different areas. The categories you put them into are up to you, but after having read through all the comments, you should have an idea of where to begin. Do your best to categorize all the comments, but don't be too concerned if you have a handful left over at the end which don't fit in any category.
3. Now look at each category separately. How many unique comments are in each? How detailed are those comments? How strongly are they stated? At this point, you should be able to identify which categories are more important and which are less important. It's not an exact process, but patterns almost always emerge if you have enough response data to work with. If you find that you have several categories which seem to be equally important, that's fine too.
4. Now, if your survey included demographic questions, look at the different subgroups to see if any relationships emerge between demographic groups and categories of comments. This might seem like a time consuming process, but the outcome will be worth the effort.

Source: *Custom Insight*